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R 101640Z FEB 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4179
INFO RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3451

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000159

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO/PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN
NSC FOR SHAPIRO, MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: THE CHOUF

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) This is the second in a series of snapshots we will produce for key electoral districts ("qada") in the run-up to the June 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

¶2. (SBU) The Chouf is one of six electoral districts in the Mount Lebanon administrative area. There are eight parliamentary seats in this predominantly Druze and Christian district, all of which are currently held by MPs allied with March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. Although Christian voters are significant in numbers, Jumblatt remains the most significant player in the district, his ancestral homeland.

¶3. (SBU) Analysts predict that a Jumblatt-backed list will win all eight seats in the Chouf for March 14. However, March 14 Christians continue to bicker about which parties in the coalition will have the right to name candidates for two of the Maronite seats. End summary.

THE CHOUF: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

¶4. (SBU) Located southeast of Beirut, the Chouf is a narrow strip that touches the coast and includes the predominantly Christian town of Damour and the valleys and mountains of the western slopes of al-Barouk Mountain. Its economy depends heavily on agriculture and tourism. Wild fires during the summer of 2008 badly damaged or destroyed 5.7 million square meters of precious forests and agricultural land. These fires present a continuing threat to the Chouf's environment and economic activities.

¶5. (SBU) The distribution of the Chouf's eight parliamentary seats is: two Druze seats, two Sunni seats, three Maronite seats and one Greek-Catholic seat. Currently, all seats are held by MPs allied with March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt.

FACTORS AT PLAY
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

¶6. (SBU) Analysts predict March 14 will retain all eight seats. However, Jumblatt and his Christian and Sunni allies have yet to agree on which candidates to run for two of the Maronite slots, with Lebanese Forces' George Adwan (incumbent), Liberal Party leader Dory Chamoun (Jumblatt's pick) and Hariri advisor Ghattas Khoury all vying for the two seats. Maronite Eli Aoun, representing the coastal area, should retain the third Maronite seat to ensure geographical balance among Christian candidates.

¶6. (SBU) Jumblatt remains focused on maintaining a calm security situation in the Chouf following the May, 2008 clashes there with Hizballah. There is, however, the risk of violence between Jumblatt's followers and supporters of the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) and former Minister Wiam Wahhab. In addition, the presence of a military base manned by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-PC) in Naameh village, in the heart of the Chouf, could be a source of tension during the election.

SISON